

2.5.1 Potential and Actual vs Potentiality and Actuality

Aristotle makes a distinction between things which exist Potentially, and things which exist Actually. Further, there is the concept of an Actuality, which is a particular state of existence which has come into Being. Let us discuss the nature of Aristotelian Potential and Actual existence. To do so, we will examine several questions. What do the Aristotelian concepts of Potential and Actual existence mean? Is Actual existence the same thing as Actuality, or are they distinct? Is Potential existence the same thing as Potentiality, or are they distinct? Is there such a thing as Potential existence within the Ideal realm, or do Ideal things only exist Actually? If Potential things exist in the Ideal realm, are they Eternally in the state of Potential existence (and consequently never in a state of Actual existence) due to the Eternal nature of the Ideal realm?

Let us begin by defining Potential existence. Potential cannot exist in of itself, as it is impossible for Potential to exist apart from something which has Potential. Potential is always possessed by something. For example, metal possesses the Potential to be a statue. Further, if metal could not be formed and shaped into anything else (e.g. a statue), then it would lack the Potential for other Forms (e.g. a statue). So, the presence of Potential requires two components. There must be a thing to possess Potential, and this thing must not be limited to its extant state (i.e. it must be compatible with flux, construction, and destruction).

Here we must differentiate two subtypes of Potential. One type is the Potential to be transformed into something else at the cost of the destruction of the original. For example, a sphere of metal has the Potential to be a metal statue. If the metal sphere becomes a metal statue, the Quality of being spherical (and thus the metal sphere) is lost completely. The other type is the Potential to change expressed Quality without being destroyed. For example, Matter may be in the Form of one Element such as Water, and then transform to be in the Form of Air. In this case, the Matter has not been destroyed.

Something is said to exist Potentially as something else when it has the possibility to Be it in the future. Is existing Potentially as something else the same thing as the specific Potentiality? Put another way, is the possibility to Be a certain way the same thing as that possible state of Being? For sake of clarity, it is best to keep these concepts separate. The difference is that Potential existence is an Actual Existence. Namely, it is Actually the case that something has the Potential to be a certain way. Metal has the Potential to be a statue Actually. Potentialities are merely the particular possibilities, and they do not have Actual existence unless they come into being. The Potentiality of a statue being made from metal only is Actual if the metal really is made into the statue. Technically, Potential implies Potentialities. Yet for the sake of clarity, it is best to compare Potential with Actual and Potentiality with Actuality. We should ask if something Actually has the Potential to be something else. For example, can a metal sphere become a statue? We may also compare Potentiality with Actuality. For example, did the metal sphere become a statue?

A Potentiality is merely a particular abstract possibility. Potential existence belongs to something. Thus, it is this substance (i.e. thing) which can possibly become a different way that has Potential. In fact, such a substance can be said to strive to achieve its various Potentialities. Sometimes these changes reinforce various Actualities within the substance. A spear which is Actually sharp may become sharper. Sometimes these changes cause destruction. A metal sphere which is turned into a statue loses the Actuality of being spherical.

2.5.2 Subjective Identity, Potential as Substrate, and Actuality as Composite.

Given the discussion above, how does Matter relate to Potential and Actual existence? Does Matter possess an Actual existence in addition to the Potential existence it possesses (in terms of the Forms it may possibly receive)? Is Matter merely the Potential, which is destroyed when an Actuality comes to pass? Put another way, when a Potentiality becomes an Actuality, what happens to the subject which possessed the Potential to Become the Potentiality? Is the subject the same, or is the subject of the Potential distinct from the subject of the Actuality? For example, when some metal ore becomes a statue, has the metal become the statue, maintaining its subjective identity? Alternatively, was the metal ore destroyed and replaced by the statue, destroying the subjective identity of the metal ore and creating the subjective identity of the statue?

With regards to Matter in a certain Form, the subjective identity of the thing which becomes Actualized is not the Matter itself. Rather, the identity belongs to the composite (i.e. aggregate) of Form expressed in the Matter. The composite identity of a metal statue is distinct from the composite identity of the metal ore. It can be said that when a composite of Form and Matter changes Form, the composite thing that it was previously is destroyed. What about less clear cases, when a composite thing is not destroyed? For example, what about an illiterate person who learns how to read? In this case, it does seem as though the subject which possesses the Potential (i.e. the illiterate person) is the same as the subject who Actualized that Potential (i.e. the person who became literate). The Potentially Wise young Socrates is the same person as the Actually Wise adult Socrates. What then are we to make of these two examples? The difference between them is whether or not something Essential has been lost. In the case of a metal statue, being metal and being in the Form of the statue are both Essential to its subjective identity. If either are lost, so is the composite subjective identity of the metal statue. In the case of Socrates, Wisdom is not essential to his subjective identity, and so its addition or loss does not destroy his subjective identity.

An Unwise person can be said to be Wise Potentially. Does this mean that an Unwise person is also a Wise person? Of course, this is not the case. This is because being Wise or Unwise is non-Essential to the subjective identity of this person. These are merely accidental features they possess. It is not this person's lack of Wisdom which makes them receptive to Wisdom. This person's Soul (including mental faculties) grants them the Potential for Wisdom due to the fact it is receptive to Wisdom. In the case where an Unwise person becomes Wise, the Potentiality has become an Actuality.

Is a person who has become Actually Wise still Potentially Wise? This is plausible according to a particular conception of Potential. We might say that the Potential for a state of being lies in some substrate (e.g. an individual or subject), and the Actual state of being lies in the composite of that substrate and an Actuality (i.e. an Actualized Potentiality, or an expressed Form). So, the person possesses the Potential to become Wise by being receptive to Wisdom. Upon gaining Wisdom, the fact that a person is receptive to Wisdom has not changed.

A subject is then a thing in a state of being a certain way Actually, while the composite of subject and a state of being is the Actuality. Existing Actually is something which a subject does. An Actuality is a composite of a subject and a particular state of being Actuality. If we take the example of the metal ore in the shape of the statue, the statue is the Particular Actuality of metal in the Form of a statue. The ore itself has Actualized that Potentiality. This distinction allows a substrate in a particular Actuality to retain its Potential. The metal possesses the Potential to be in the Form of a statue, and it retains that Potential even when it is Actually in the Form of a statue. However, we need to be careful in that we do

not mistake the Actuality of possessing Potential, with the Actuality of being a certain way Actually. For example, possessing the Potential for Courage is clearly not the same thing as acting Courageously. At the same time, the presence of a certain state Actually can bring about certain Actualities. For example, possessing Courage Actually does bring about the Actuality of Courageous actions.

2.5.3 Potential and Actual Within the Ideal

Now we have established what is necessary to determine if Ideal things exist Actually. If so, are they merely things that which Actually exist, or are they also Actualities in of themselves?

If there is no Matter in the Ideal realm, then there can be no Potential there either. As we discussed earlier, Potential requires the possibility of flux and transformation, and Matter is necessary for flux and change to occur (See notes on Ennead Two, Fourth Tractate, Sections 3 and 6). If nothing fluxes and changes in the Ideal realm, there is nothing which has the Potential to be another way.

If there is Ideal Matter, can we then grant Potentiality to the Ideal Realm? After all, there is Ideal Form and Ideal Matter which receives it. Ideal Matter could correspond with the substrate which has Potential, the Idea itself could corresponded with an individual Potentiality, and the combination of Idea and Matter could correspond with a composite Actuality. While this sounds plausible, it is incorrect. The trick is that the Matter of the Ideal realm is itself Ideal. Ideal Matter is of a fundamentally different nature. Of course, it is possible for an Ideal thing to act as a substrate or Matter for something else. All Ideal Matter is, after all, Ideal. Even Soul is simultaneously Ideal and substrate for a Higher order Being. Since Soul acts as a substrate, can it then be said to possess the Potential for a higher form of Potentiality? The answer is that no, Potential cannot exist in the Ideal Realm. The Ideal Realm is Eternal and timeless. Ideal Matter does not transform or flux in accordance with its respective Ideal Form. Ideal Matter Eternally is in congruence with the entire scope of its corresponding Ideal Form. This difference in Ideal Matter makes it incongruent with the concept of Potential.

What about Soul? Is it not the case that Soul possesses the Potentiality of being an Animated Being (i.e. living Being) before an Animal is born? Are there not other Potentialities which exist in Soul? For example, is there not music which exists as a Potentiality within a Soul that will eventually animate the Body of a musician? Are these not, in a sense, Ideal Potentialities? The answer is that these things do not exist as Potentialities in Soul, but rather Soul has the ability to bring about these things. The Potential lies in the Corporeal substrate (which is capable of flux) that a Soul will Animate. Soul merely possesses the ability to bring these Potentialities out with the Corporeal substrate. As an analogy, the Potential statue exists within the metal or stone, not the sculptor.

With Potential settled, what is the nature of Actual existence applicable to the Ideal realm? A statue only possesses Actual existence when a substrate (i.e. metal or stone) is carved or forged into the Form of a statue. Does each Ideal thing possesses Actual existence by nature of the fact that it is a composite of Form and substrate (i.e. Ideal Matter)? This is not the case. Beings within the Ideal Realm are perfect and Eternal. The Actualization process for Corporeal things is not applicable, and trying to apply that line of reasoning results in a false projection of time and flux into the Ideal Realm. There is no process for moving from Potential to Actual in the Ideal realm, as this would incorrectly imply that there is some prior state of being in the Ideal realm which possessed Potential. Rather, the Ideal realm contains everything within it at once. The difference is that Corporeal things require something external to themselves to bring about flux, and thus shift something from Potential to Actual. Ideal Beings exist and possess everything as a part of their Essence in of themselves. Consequently, all Ideal beings (i.e. Intellectual Principles) Eternally exist Actually. Soul (when it is not bound up in Corporeal Matter) is Ideal

and thus the same. With regards to Soul which animates a Body, it is a different Actuality formed of the composite of Soul and Body.

Some may object that this notion of Actual existence in the Ideal realm would have Actual existence and Actuality be one in the same. This would mean that not only do the Ideal concepts themselves have Actual existence, but each of the possible Variant Manifestations also possess existence as Actualities. Our response is that this is not a problem. As Plato writes in the *Timaeus*, the Beings of this realm are sleepless. They do not require refinement and improvement. It stands to reason that since the nature of this realm is perfection (i.e. each Form completely and flawlessly encompassing its domain), each Ideal Being is eternally Actual, and each of its variants are themselves perfect Actualities (as opposed to imperfect Corporeal emanations). Since Beauty is said to be adherence to Form (See Notes on *Ennead One, Sixth Tractate*), then the Ideal Actualities are the most Beautiful possible. This perfect Actuality is why the Ideal Realm (i.e. Intellectual Realm) is the source of life. Its Actualities constitute the very foundation and source of Soul and Intellect.

2.5.4 Matter and Being

All other things (i.e. Sensible Beings) which have Potential are themselves something in addition to their Potentialities. This Potential is with respect to the subject, and so Potential for a future Potentiality is said to exist presently within the subject. What then can be said of Matter in of itself? Matter is Potentially all Sensible Beings, but it is not in of itself any of them. After all, if Matter in of itself were any of the particular Sensible Beings, it would have Sensible features. If Matter had Sensible features in of itself, then it could not have the Potential to Become any Beings with incongruent Sensible Features.

If Matter is not any of the Sensible Beings, then Matter must not be a Sensible Being. Yet how can Matter become any of the Sensible beings Actually if it is not a Sensible Being in the first place? The answer is that while Matter may not Be any of the Sensible Beings which are contingent upon it, it may have a sort of Being (i.e. existence) in of itself which is not contingent upon Matter. Put another way, Matter cannot have itself as a prerequisite for itself. Since Matter is not Essentially any of the composite combinations of Form and Matter which are contingent upon it, it is itself not a Sensible Being. In addition, since Matter is characteristically Formless, it is not an Ideal Form either. Thus, Matter is neither a Sensible Being, nor is it an Ideal Being (i.e. Intellectual Being).

If Matter then has no Corporeal or Ideal Being, it has successfully taken flight from the classes of Definite Beings in any realm. Matter is not even an illusory image (e.g. a shadow) of a Definite Being, as it doesn't even possess anything received from a Real Being. If Matter is not under any of the modes of Being, then what can it Actually Be?

2.5.5 Matter as Potential

When then can we say of Matter? How can Matter be the substance of Beings?

The answer is that Matter is these Beings Potentially. Given that Matter has Potential existence, it can be said to exist after all. This Potential Existence is not the same as the Actual existence of the Beings Matter Becomes. Its Existence is that of possibility, as though it were an announcement of things to come.

Matter then is pure Potential. In this way, Matter is not Actually any particular Being, yet it is Potentially all Beings. In of itself, it possesses no Essence beyond the nature of Matter itself. It has no Actualized Qualities (i.e. expressions of Form). As soon as something becomes Actualized, it is no longer solely

Matter. Something Actualized can only be Matter and the addition of a certain Form. Matter is then like the metal of a statue. The statue is not merely the metal, but metal in the shape of a statue.

If Matter can be said to not be a Being, this is not the same as saying that it is of a different category of things than Being. For example, motion is a different category of thing than Beings. In fact, motion is a Quality which is attributed to and contingent upon a Being. Matter itself is the opposite. It is what is left when all Qualities are removed. Matter in of itself is completely devoid of Qualities, and Matter in of itself can only ever be this. This is because in order for Matter to have the Potential to Become all Beings, it itself must be none of them. For whenever Matter expresses Quality, it is no longer Matter itself, but a composite of Form and Matter. Matter itself can only ever be Unqualified Potential.

The Unqualified Potential is what Matter Actually is. Matter is the thing which receives Quality (i.e. expresses form) from the Real Beings (i.e. Ideal Forms). In a sense, Matter can be thought of as of Non-Being. Matter Essentially lacks any of the Qualities which are themselves the Actualizations of Being. Matter then is as different from the Nature of Possessing Actualities as is possible. If we remove the Potential from something that is Essentially Potential, we have destroyed this thing. Thus, Matter is pure Potential. It is Essentially not a Being. If we remove any Potential from Matter, we have destroyed Matter's purity. If we make Actuality out of Pure Potential, then we have destroyed the Pure Potential by introducing something antithetical to its purity. If Matter is to be the substance for all things, it must have the Potential to become all things. Thus, Matter can only be Pure Potential and nothing else.